



7-1-2016

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Recommended Citation

Kaminker, J. (2016). Introduction to the special topic section: Jung and transpersonal psychology. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 35 (2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2016.35.2.48>



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Introduction to the Special Topic Section: Jung and Transpersonal Psychology

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Transpersonal psychology has been entwined with the trajectory of Jungian (1963/1989) thought since its inception. Jung has been credited with coining the term transpersonal (Vaughan, 2013) and has often been identified as a key figure in transpersonal psychology, with his model even being called the “first transpersonal psychology” (Cortright, 1997, p. 82). The differentiating characteristic of Jung’s system of thought is his clearly defined model of the psyche and psychological transformation, when compared with the wider scope of the field of transpersonal psychology, which contains comparatively far more perspectives. Transpersonal psychology, rather than systematizing theories, defines itself by its subject matter: transpersonal states, practices, disciplines, and so forth (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993). Many conflicting theorists can therefore be considered transpersonal if they incorporate these topics into their respective models.

To Greenwood (1990), Jung’s perspective on religion represents the inner, psychological, private approach to religion, and Greenwood defined transpersonal as “a simultaneously objective and subjective awareness” (p. 483). A complete transpersonal analysis, she argued, requires incorporating Jung’s subjective perspective with another, more objective perspective. In her model, she used Durkheim’s collective consciousness to emphasize and examine “sacred religious beliefs, or collective representations [that] bind societies together through publicly acknowledged symbols and rites. The sacred thus represents that which is socially acceptable in religion” (Greenwood, 1990, p. 482).

Jungian psychology has a unique language for describing the relationship between the collective and the individual. Any theoretical system language, as useful and illuminating as it may be, can tend to construct around itself a paradigm that defies reexamination. Cortright (1997) pointed out that:

Psychology and spirituality have each produced different languages and metaphors for describing

the human condition. The word “metaphor” does not mean that these approaches are mere fantasies or poetic images, for in one sense all of science and philosophy are metaphors. ... Spiritual and psychological systems, then, are but those abiding descriptions and metaphors that have resonated most deeply with human experience over time. Both spiritual and psychological traditions speak to what we are, to what is wrong with the human condition, and to the transformative possibilities open to us. A comprehensive theory of transpersonal psychology strives to integrate the world’s spiritual and psychological approaches into a new whole and tries to find a common, underlying methodology for producing growth and change. (Cortright, 1997, p. 25)

The relatively recent advent of Western psychology was not the first time that humans began questioning the nature of consciousness, of suffering, of meaning-making, of social dynamics, and of the relationship between the individual and the collective. Before psychology in its modern form, these theoretical questions were largely relegated to the fields of theology and the praxis to religion and spirituality. There is a collective record of questioning and of finding methods for addressing these questions that is contained in our religious and spiritual traditions. While Jung (1963/1989) was the first to bridge these records with Western psychology, and he did so in his own very personal way, transpersonal psychology is another standard bearer of this valuable resource and this mission to bring greater collective light to these riches.

In This Issue

In *Gnawing at the Roots: Toward a Transpersonal Poetics of Guilt and Death*, Jason Butler uses an archetypal psychological approach in the tradition of James Hillman (2004) to engage in a very poetic and personal exploration of guilt and addiction in the

wake of war. This is done through the archetype of the Criminal and Kafka's (1925/1998) novel *The Trial*, and through a symbolic exploration of the alchemical use of the color black.

In *Meaningful Mutations: Reflections on the Synchronicity of Evolution*, Ritske Rensma brings Jung's (1952) theory of synchronicity into dialogue with both the Darwinian and Lamarckian concepts of evolution. Though Jung never wrote directly on this topic, the author makes use of Jung's written correspondence with friends Erich Neumann (Jung, 1973a; 1973b) and physicist Wolfgang Pauli (2001) to surmise Jung's perspective on the topic of evolution and whether he may have been influenced by this Darwin-Lamarck conversation.

In the paper, *Darkness in the Contemporary Scientific Imagination and Its Implications*, Joe Cambray explores the collective imagination as it relates to the theoretical physical concepts of dark matter and dark energy. Within the context of cosmology as a mirror for the collective psyche, and through the history of science, the author explores the symbolism of light and darkness, using, in part, an alchemical lens. The unknown spaces of the cosmos hereby mirror the dark corners of the psyche.

In *Nature and Human Psychological Consciousness: A Post-Jungian and Transpersonal Approach*, Karen Palamos offers a post-Jungian and transpersonal perspective on our collective psychological relationship to nature. She acknowledges Jung's perspective, that humans are continuous with nature and not separate from it. She brings in literature from ecopsychology, post-Jungian, and transpersonal thought to explore themes of transcendence through and connection to nature, as well as the lack and longing for such.

My own contribution, *Images, Figures and Qualities: Clarifying the Relationship Between Individual and Archetype*, is an exploration of the relationship between individual, culture, and archetype. It differentiates between esoteric and conceptual *archetypal qualities*, cultural *archetypal figures*, and the individual *archetypal images*. There is an examination of symbolism and meaning and a look at how these dynamics play out in specific cultural figures, such as Che Guevara, Mother Theresa, George Washington, and Jesus of Nazareth. From these cultural artifacts, I ask how archetypal figures become canonized into our collective imagination, and how they can serve in the

capacity of non-egoic intelligence, helping to guide us towards living our highest ideals.

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About the Journal

The *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* is a peer-reviewed academic journal in print since 1981. It is sponsored by the California Institute of Integral Studies, published by Floraglates Foundation, and serves as the official publication of the International Transpersonal Association. The journal is available online at www.transpersonalstudies.org, and in print through www.lulu.com (search for IJTS).